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Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development

Strengthening of the United Nations system

Letter dated 28 May 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the statement by the President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, on the occasion of the National Independence Day of Georgia, 26 May.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda items 33, 37 and 58.

(*Signed*) Peter **Chkheidze**
Ambassador
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Annex

Statement by Eduard Shevardnadze, President of Georgia, on the occasion of the anniversary of the national independence of Georgia

On 26 May, the Georgian people celebrate the most cherished national holiday, day of the national independence.

On 26 May, in the year 1918, the National Assembly of Georgia adopted the declaration on the Reinstation of Georgia's Statehood. But the Georgian Democratic Republic had been destined to survive for only three years. In February 1921, as a result of an aggression of Bolshevik Russia, the Georgian Government was forced to flee the country. The Red Army came in and occupied the Republic.

Yet, our people never ceased the fight for independence. The youth of Georgia have repeatedly proved that, once instilled with common aspiration, they are capable of facing the savage totalitarian force to defend their dignity, their homeland and their rich cultural heritage.

On 9 April 1989, the brave men and women of our country laid down their lives for Georgia's independence, and on the same day in 1991, the Supreme Council of Georgia once again restored the country's independence on the basis of the Act adopted on 26 May 1918.

At present, Georgia is a sovereign State and a full-fledged member of the international community. The statehood of today's democratic Georgia rests not only on the experience of the country's short-lived independence in the 1920s, but benefits mainly from its 3,000-year tradition of statehood.

During the vicissitudes of history, the small country has succeeded in retaining its unique language, writing culture and the deep-rooted tradition of hospitality.

In Georgia, the 1995 Constitution is in effect. The document was adopted by the country's Parliament as a result of lengthy discussions and mutual concessions.

Georgia's present Constitution is based upon the provisions of the Constitution of 1921. Its very first Article provides that Georgia is an independent, unified and indivisible State. This principle was reaffirmed during the referendum held on 31 March 1991, in which the Georgian population expressed its strong resolve to restore the country's statehood.

The outcome of the referendum also constitutes the legal basis for Georgia's integrity, since the plebiscite was held throughout the country, including the regions of Abkhazia and Tskinvali.

Regrettably, the conflicts in those parts of Georgia, spawned by the resurgence of the aggressive separatism, are still unsettled, seriously hampering Georgia's democratic development. Nevertheless, we cherish the hope that the tireless efforts of the international community and the United Nations, as the world organization, will ultimately bring about the comprehensive political settlement of the conflicts by peaceful means and will rule out the necessity of resorting to peace enforcement measures.

The complicated problems that have plagued the Georgian people since the very first years of independence, could not shake or change their strong resolve to strengthen and develop the country's statehood.

As a result of the accomplished reforms, democratic institutions have been established. Freedom of speech, mass media, religious tolerance, equality of ethnic groups and political pluralism have become the accepted social norms of today's Georgia.

Georgia is now a dynamic and rapidly developing country which is yearning to regain and establish its function and place among the family of nations through cooperation, interaction and assistance from friendly countries.

In 1999, Georgia became a full-fledged member of the Council of Europe. The country's incorporation into this important organization has once again proven the significance of the accomplished success and the irreversibility of the democratic processes in the country.

Despite the last year's world financial crisis, which seriously affected Georgia's budget, the country's leadership has succeeded in retaining the banking system and the stability of the national currency, which creates favourable conditions for the ongoing reforms.

The problem of 250,000 refugees and displaced persons heavily burdens the fledgling Georgian State. The fate of these destitute people, who have fallen victim to the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Abkhaz separatists, remains the most painful problem of our country.

Georgia closely cooperates with its neighbouring States in the Caucasus region, trying to play a positive role in the settlement of conflicts and to contribute to the development of economic cooperation in the region. Georgia has also come up as the initiator of the regional movement known as the "Peaceful Caucasus", on the basis of which a number of important documents have been signed by Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Russian Federation.

The economic project known as the "Revival of the Old Silk Road", which builds a bridge between Asia and Europe, has been brought into effect and now represents an important system of communication. The Baku-Supsa strategic pipeline, the transport corridor from Central Asia to the Black Sea, is already functioning in this framework. Georgia, with its important geopolitical situation, is the essential element of this endeavour.

Despite the progress achieved in such a short period of time, the Georgian people have to come to grips with many complicated problems. These problems are especially acute in the country's western region, Abkhazia, where tens of thousands of people have lost their lives as a result of the armed conflict kindled by the followers of the aggressive separatism.

Three fourths of the population of the region had to forsake their homes and hundreds of thousands of civilians turned into refugees and internally displaced persons.

Unfortunately, the situation remains extremely precarious and explosive, posing a threat to Georgia's stability. Several assassination attempts have been carried out against the President of Georgia. In Abkhazia, the continued violence committed against the spontaneously returned Georgian population, serves to provoke new hostilities.

Social conditions remain harsh for the significant part of the population of Georgia. The rate of unemployment is high and the slow development of the main branches of industry causes dissatisfaction. The Government of Georgia is, nevertheless, making all efforts to improve the situation. Realistic and sound measures are being taken by the authorities to that effect. Tireless work is being done to curb and prevent the prevailing corruption.

We are confident that the economic cooperation in the region will become a powerful tool for strengthening peace and stability. The implementation of important projects is of vital interest to many countries of the world.

Our country fully supports the United Nations in its efforts to play a decisive role in resolving global problems and to create necessary conditions for the prevention of crimes against humanity, including genocide and ethnic cleansing, for on the eve of the twenty-first century, the presence of such problems insults mankind as well as universally accepted values.

We wholeheartedly welcome the ongoing reforms in the United Nations system and believe that this process should not lose momentum, so that the United Nations becomes more efficient and stronger.

Georgia affirms its will to cooperate with all the nations on the basis of universally accepted principles of mutual benefit, non-interference in internal affairs and good-neighbourly relations.